

# Development of a 1K x 1K GaAs QWIP far IR imaging array

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**ABSTRACT**—In the on-going evolution of GaAs Quantum Well Infrared Photodetectors (QWIPs), and with the support of NASA's Earth Science Technology Office (ESTO), we are developing a 1,024 x 1,024 (1K x 1K) far infrared focal plane array (FPA) to cover the 8-14  $\mu\text{m}$  spectral range. We have, as a precursor, developed and tested a 1K x 1K narrow band (8.4-9 $\mu\text{m}$ ) QWIP array. This 1 megapixel detector array is a hybrid using the Rockwell TCM 8050 silicon readout integrated circuit (ROIC) bump bonded to a GaAs QWIP array fabricated jointly by engineers at the Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) and the Army Research Laboratory (ARL). The finished hybrid is thinned at the Jet Propulsion Lab (JPL). Prior to this development the largest format array was a 512 x 640 FPA. We have integrated the 1K x 1K array into an imaging camera system and performed tests over the 40K-90K temperature range achieving BLIP performance at an operating temperature of 76K (f/2 camera system). In this paper we will present results of our 1K x 1K QWIP array development including fabrication methodology, test data and our imaging results.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, remarkable advances in the development of GaAs QWIP focal plane arrays have been made. It was only in the late 1980s that single element, angle lapped QWIPs were developed and used [1]. In the 1990s rapid development from single element QWIPs to 512 x 640 arrays [2,3] occurred across a broad spectrum of the near to far infrared. With the concurrent development of large format silicon readout ICs it has been a relatively simple task for QWIP technology to keep pace. We have recently developed an 8.4-9  $\mu\text{m}$ , 1K x 1K QWIP array which was hybridized to a Rockwell Scientific TCM 8050 ROIC. The array was designed jointly by engineers at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) and the Army Research Laboratory (ARL) and was also jointly fabricated in Goddard's Detector Development Laboratory [4]. Engineers at the Rockwell Science Center in

Camarillo, CA performed wafer dicing, indium deposition and hybridization. The hybrid was subsequently thinned at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). Testing was performed at both GSFC and the ARL. As with any technological advance we encountered our fair share of hurdles. The design and fabrication of the QWIP arrays was probably the easiest part of the project. However, since the hybridization technology tends to focus on materials other than GaAs we experienced some incompatibilities in the hybridization, thinning and subsequent cooling processes. Thermal incompatibilities caused catastrophic failures of two FPAs, much to our consternation. However, we were able to capture some images before one of the failures and collected data on a third array. One of the advantages of GaAs QWIP technology is the ability to fabricate arrays in a fashion similar to and compatible with silicon IC technology. The designer's ability to easily select the spectral response of the material from 3 $\mu\text{m}$  to beyond 15 $\mu\text{m}$  is the result of the success of band-gap engineering.

The applications for QWIP arrays are numerous. At GSFC some of these potential applications include: studying troposphere and stratosphere temperatures and identifying trace chemicals; tree canopy energy balance measurements; measuring cloud layer emissivities, droplet/particle size, composition and height; SO<sub>2</sub> and aerosol emissions from volcanic eruptions; tracking dust particles (from the Sahara Desert, e.g.); CO<sub>2</sub> absorption; coastal erosion; ocean/river thermal gradients and pollution; analyzing radiometers and other scientific equipment used in obtaining ground truthing and atmospheric data acquisition; ground based astronomy, and; temperature sounding. Defense and military applications include surveillance, target identification, FLIR, fire control and mine detection [5]. The potential commercial applications are quite diverse. The utility of QWIP arrays in medical instrumentation is well

documented [6] and may become one of the most significant QWIP technology drivers. The success of OmniCorder Technologies use of 256 x 256 narrow band QWIP arrays for aiding in the detection of malignant tumors is quite remarkable. Other potential commercial applications for QWIP arrays include: location of forest fires and residual warm spots; location of unwanted vegetation encroachment; monitoring crop health; monitoring food processing contamination, ripeness and spoilage [7]; locating power line transformer failures in remote areas; monitoring effluents from industrial operations such as paper mills, mining sites and power plants; IR microscopy; searching for a wide variety of thermal leaks and not least of all; locating new sources of spring water. Recently, F. Freund and his colleagues [8] have been conducting experiments to simulate the effects of the extreme pressures acting on granite cubes to simulate precursor earthquake events. A Goddard built QWIP camera using a Lockheed Martin 256 x 256, 8-8.5  $\mu\text{m}$ , EQWIP [9] was used to detect IR photonic emission during the compressive loading of the granite.

## 2. QWIP ARRAY DESIGN AND FABRICATION

The design and fabrication of the 1K x 1K QWIP array is straightforward and relatively simple. The architecture of the ROIC determines the pixel pitch which is 18  $\mu\text{m}$  for the Rockwell TCM 8050 ROIC. The spectral response of the detector elements is determined by the quantum well structure, which is grown on semi-insulating GaAs substrate. Since QWIP devices do not respond to normal incidence radiation a method of deflecting the incoming radiation to a direction that is parallel to the wafer surface must be included in the design and fabrication. The ARL has pioneered the technique [10] of corrugating the QWIP array with V-grooves, which reflect normal incidence light 90 degrees into the QWIP. The pixel geometry design is shown in Fig. 1. Corrugated QWIPs (C-QWIPs) rely on inclined sidewalls to reflect normal incident light into parallel propagation.

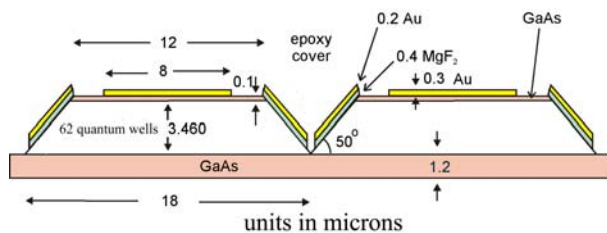


Fig. 1. Cross-section of a C-QWIP pixel.

Assuming the angle of the corrugation sidewalls were 45° instead of 50°, the unpolarized external quantum efficiency  $\eta$ , calculated from the decay of light along the

optical path, can be expressed as [11]

$$\eta(\alpha, p, t) = \frac{4n}{(1+n)^2} \left\{ \frac{1}{p} \left[ t + \frac{e^{-\alpha p}}{2\alpha} (1 - e^{2\alpha t}) \right] + K_0 \right\}, \quad (1)$$

where  $n = 3.34$  (the refractive index of GaAs),  $p$  is the corrugation period,  $t$  is the height of the corrugations,  $\alpha$  is the absorption coefficient the vertically polarized, parallel propagation light, and  $K_0$  is the internal unpolarized quantum efficiency created by the sidewalls at the ends of the corrugations. For infinitely long corrugations,  $K_0$  will be zero, but its value increases with decreasing pixel size. The geometry of a C-QWIP is fixed by the ratio  $t/p$ , which is an important structural parameter. Within the 45° sidewall approximation, when  $t/p = 0.5$ , the corrugation cross-section is a triangle. When  $t/p$  decreases, the corrugation becomes a shallow trapezoid. Detectors with a fixed  $t/p$  will have a fixed projection area fill factor  $S$  ( $=2t/p$ ) available for light reflection i.e. the ratio of the normal incident radiation that is reflected to the total surface incident radiation. For the triangular corrugations ( $S = 1$ ), the maximum  $\eta$  is  $0.5 \times 0.71 \times S = 0.36$ , which is half of the unpolarized unit incident power times the transmission coefficient of the substrate. For the trapezoidal corrugation with  $S = 0.5$ , the maximum  $\eta$  is 0.18. For a given  $p$ ,  $S$  can be increased by using a thicker active material. The value of  $\eta$  can be increased using an anti-reflection coating but was not applied to the present FPAs. Alternatively,  $\eta$  can be increased by thinning the substrate which doubles the optical path length. The noise equivalent temperature difference, NEAT is determined by the ratio of  $I_p$  to the dark current  $I_d$  [12,13]. Hence, the detection sensitivity depends on  $\eta/I_d$  rather than  $\eta$  alone. Furthermore, background limited performance BLIP is achieved only when  $I_p > I_d$ . Due to the reduced active volume in C-QWIPs,  $I_d$  is reduced by a factor  $(p-t)/p = (1-S/2)$ . Therefore, when comparing with other couplings that have no dark current reduction, as with a grating, a new quantity  $\eta'$  is defined, where

$$\eta' \equiv \eta \frac{I_d(45)}{I_d} = \eta \frac{p}{p-t} = \frac{\eta}{1-S/2}. \quad (2)$$

The value of  $\eta'$  is the quantum efficiency normalized to the full geometrical dark current. The mesas, shown in figure 1, are created by wet etching through a square mesa mask. With this approach, there is undercut in one of the directions, which significantly shortens the length of the corrugations and reduces the material fill factor. It is this undercutting which makes it infeasible to produce a viable 9  $\mu\text{m}$  thick triangular corrugation (which would have a larger QE) with a single chemical etching. When one etches 9  $\mu\text{m}$  into the material, the undercut in the other direction will eliminate the majority of the active material.

Our numerical analysis modeling predicts the total quantum efficiency combined from both sets of sidewalls to be 15% for unthinned and 20% for thinned devices. This level of performance is comparable to that with 9  $\mu\text{m}$  tall corrugations even though the actual superlattice thickness is a manageable 3.6  $\mu\text{m}$ .

Our QWIP array fabrication process requires three masks for: 1) the detector mesa formation; 2) the ohmic metal pixel contacts and; 3) the insulator/reflector layer definition. The process begins with a wafer cleaning procedure followed by photoresist deposition and the exposure of the mesa definition mask. A phosphoric peroxide acid etches the GaAs mesas. The second masking step defines the lift-off areas of deposited Ge/Au/Ag/Au metal followed by a rapid thermal anneal. The third mask step defines the areas for lifting off the insulator and sidewall metal reflector. This sidewall reflector is mainly to prevent possible infrared absorption in the epoxy through the fringing optical field. This third step can be eliminated depending on the epoxy backfill requirement of the subsequent hybridization process. The entire QWIP wafer fabrication process can be completed in less than 4 days. Five complete 1K x 1K die were fabricated on a single 3-inch wafer but 4-inch diameter wafers are just as available. After fabrication we performed some diagnostic tests and then sent the wafer to Rockwell Science Center for the hybridization process. Indium bumps are applied, the wafer is diced and candidates are bump bonded to the silicon readout. The hybrids were either packaged in an LCC or sent to JPL for further thinning. In order to test the detector characteristics in a single detector format, we also processed a wafer with the same QW specifications except that the number of QW periods was 40 instead of 62. This test wafer was processed into large area C-QWIPs with a corrugation period of 8.5  $\mu\text{m}$ .

The 1K x 1K die were bump bonded to Rockwell's TCM 8050 ROIC [14]. The characteristics of this particular ROIC are identified in Table 1. This is one of the only readouts available with an adequate full well capacity for high background applications. Most very large format readouts are intended for low background, astronomical applications where the number of available photons is generally small.

TABLE 1. Characteristics of the Rockwell TCM 8050 ROIC.

Array Format	1,024 x 1,024
Pixel size	18 $\mu\text{m}$ x 18 $\mu\text{m}$
Number of video outputs	4
Full well capacity	3 million electrons
Max pixel rate	20 MHz/channel
Conversion gain	0.34 $\mu\text{V}/\text{e}^-$ to 2.7 $\mu\text{V}/\text{e}^-$
Read noise	<300 electrons
Power dissipation	<150 mW
Cold operating temperature	below 70K

Shown below in Fig. 2 are two images. The first is an image of a section of the QWIP wafer surface showing the pixels and substrate contacts. The second photograph shows the mounted 1K x 1K QWIP hybrid in an LCC package.

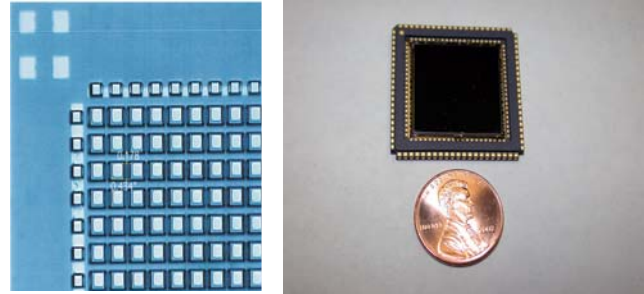


Fig. 2. Photomicrograph of QWIP array corner of about 70 pixels (left) and photograph of QWIP hybrid in an LCC (right).

### 3. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

The mean spectral response of the detectors in the FPA was measured by imaging the output slit of a grating monochromator (Optronics Laboratories OL750) onto the FPA and collecting images of the monochromatic light from 7-10  $\mu\text{m}$  at 0.1  $\mu\text{m}$  intervals. The spectral response was measured at a bias of -1 V and an operating temperature of 65K. The result is shown in Fig. 3. In addition, the large area test sample was characterized in another system with an equivalent applied bias of -3 V and  $T=10$  K. The slight difference between the two detectors is probably due to the differences in the measuring systems, the wafer materials and the applied bias.

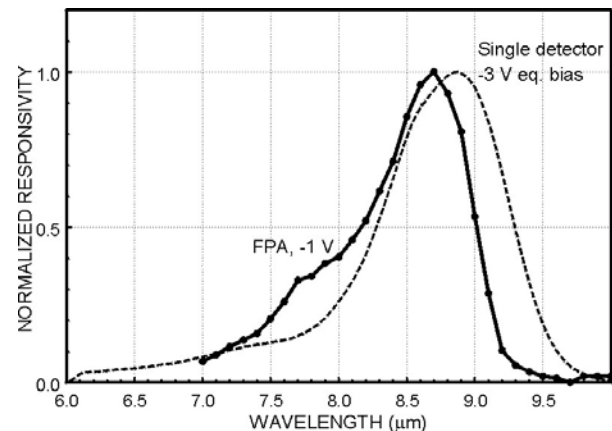


Fig. 3. Spectral response of C-QWIP single detector and FPA.

The first two FPAs we fabricated were not thinned. The first FPA which was used to measure the spectral response failed mechanically (shattered) after only three thermal

cycles before we could accurately measure the dark current and responsivity. The second FPA we tested had a defect in the ROIC that prevented us from adjusting the integration time. The integration time was slaved to the frame rate and as result was a fixed 50 ms. In order to avoid saturation of the ROIC charge well, we had to decrease the bias on the detector to  $-0.1$  V. Nevertheless, we were able to observe that the dark current and photocurrent were approximately equal at 75 K and we were able to acquire a number of  $1024 \times 512$  laboratory images. Fig. 4 shows the pixel total current  $I_{\text{tot}}$  as a function of temperature with a 293 K background. Over the range of temperatures we tested the FPA, the decrease of  $I_{\text{tot}}$  is significantly slower than that estimated from the activation energy of the dark current. Therefore, the detection is near the QWIP BLIP limit at a temperature as high as 76K, similar to the test sample. This result indicates that the light coupling is not affected by the small S design. The level of  $I_{\text{tot}}$  of the FPA is consistent with  $I_p + I_d$  of the test detector for the same equivalent bias.

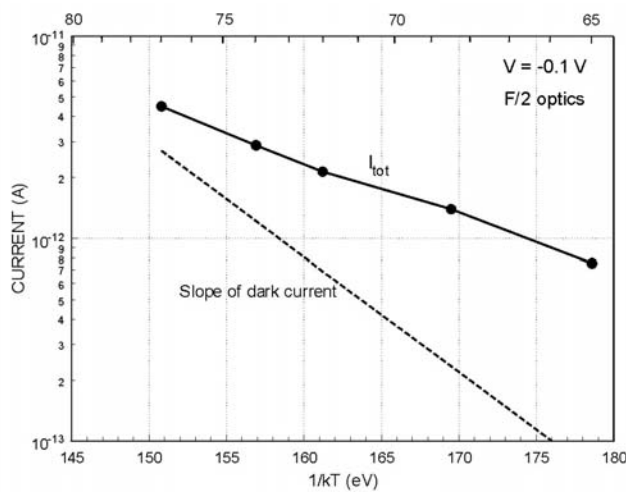


Fig. 4. The pixel total current from a constant background of 293 K.

The near BLIP performance is supported by the high quality infrared imageries taken over this temperature range. Two (of many) images are shown in Fig. 5 taken with the FPA at 65 K. There is a slight improvement before signal processing between the images we collected at 77K and the 65K images. The further improvement displayed in the two images taken at 65 K are a result of a combination of factors including refined optical focusing and a higher pre-amp gain. We were severely constrained by the inability to adjust the integration time and some excess system noise.

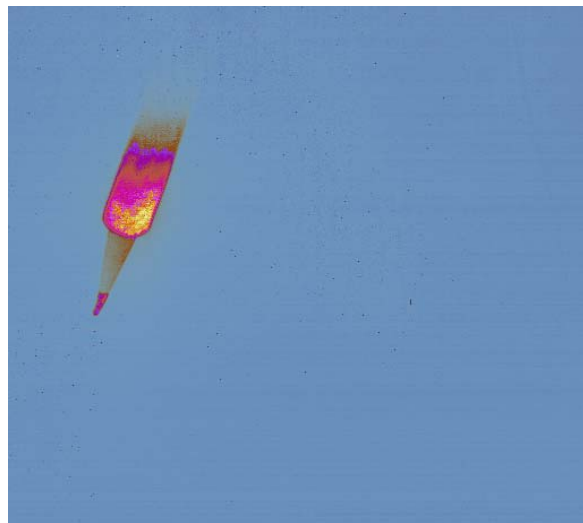


Fig. 5. Images acquired with the  $8.4\text{-}9\mu\text{m}$ ,  $1\text{K} \times 1\text{K}$  QWIP array. Two-quadrant ( $512 \times 1\text{K}$ ) image of engineers and an exposed computer CPU and a high-resolution 1 quadrant ( $512 \times 512$ ) image of a heated soldering iron tip;  $T = 65\text{K}$  in both images.

#### 4. FUTURE WORK

We have, up to this point, successfully developed three generations of QWIP arrays starting with the development of a  $128 \times 128$  array<sup>15</sup> a  $256 \times 256$  array and recently a  $640 \times 512$ , four-color array<sup>3</sup>. We have encountered little or no difficulty in the hybridization of the GaAs to the appropriate ROIC. This is largely due to the fact that we were following in the footsteps of the technology pioneered in the development of HgCdTe arrays. However, in the hybridization of this array and the subsequent thermal cycling during testing we encountered a number of catastrophic failures. The QWIP arrays are relatively inexpensive and can be quite plentiful with high yield but this is not the case for large format, science grade ROICs and hybridization. In the immediate future we will solve our thermal mismatch problems and fabricate new arrays and hybrids. Our test data was

acquired from QWIP arrays that were unthinned which compromises the performance of the device. Future arrays will be thinned which requires an undesirable break in the hybridization process.

The funding generously provided by the NASA Earth Science Technology Office (ESTO) grant is to develop an 8-14  $\mu\text{m}$ , 1K x 1K array as part of the Advanced Component Technology program. We are continuing to refine the GaAs fabrication process to improve a number of process related performance factors such as quantum efficiency, optical collection efficiency and excess dark current. We have started fabricating arrays with a quantum well structure that currently spans the 8-13  $\mu\text{m}$  spectrum and expect results this year. The array uniformity and 1/f noise is intrinsically well behaved so QWIP improvements can be made at the materials and processing levels. With the current advancement of mechanical cryocoolers [16] operating far IR QWIP arrays without cryogen is rapidly becoming commonplace further simplifying new system implementation.

## 5. SUMMARY

We have successfully developed and operated a 1K x 1K GaAs QWIP array. The design, fabrication, hybridization and testing were accomplished through a highly collaborative effort between Goddard, the Army Research Lab, JPL and Rockwell with each group contributing their own particular technological expertise. Even though the effort is the culmination of many years of QWIP research and development, we as a group were able to develop this device with minimal funding and in a very short span of time. The ease of fabrication, the relatively high device yield, the compatibility with existing silicon processing techniques and the compatibility with a variety of available readout ICs make QWIP technology very attractive for many applications. We expect that after refining our fabrication techniques that large format arrays sensitive in the near to far IR with a tunable bandwidth will be routinely available. Performance of these arrays will be comparable to any existing QWIP devices (e.g. NEAT < 10mK in the 7-9 $\mu\text{m}$  band). As with any new development we encountered some hurdles which limited our current capabilities but which are currently being remedied. Specifically, we need to refine our packaging technique to minimize thermal effects. Our initial results indicate we have solved this problem but at great expense

to our initial inventory of five devices. We are currently fabricating an additional lot of devices which will use the same Rockwell TCM 8050 ROIC. We are intending to pursue the development of a 2K x 2K array but the limitation is the readout availability and cost. Manufacturing the detector is straightforward.

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